

Bipartisan Amendment Restricts Access to Deadly Hydrocodone Drugs

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan’s federal legislation to crack down on prescription drug abuse won a huge victory in the U.S. Senate as a crucial provision to restrict access to some of the most addictive and deadly narcotics passed with bipartisan support. The amendment to the Food And Drug Administration Safety and Innovation Act, offered by Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin, is identical to the Buchanan proposal to reclassify hydrocodone combination drugs from a Schedule III to a Schedule II drug – making them more difficult to prescribe and obtain. Final Senate approval of the FDA bill is expected later today.

“This is a win for every man, woman, and child who has endured the horrors inflicted by the addictive nature of drugs containing hydrocodone,” said Buchanan. “Too many of our loved ones are dying every day from prescription drug overdoses and are abusing these deadly painkillers for non-medical purposes. I have personally met with the victims of this scourge throughout Florida and credit them with inspiring my legislation. This amendment is an important step in tackling this epidemic. I salute Senator Manchin for joining me in this fight.”

Currently a Schedule III substance, highly-addictive hydrocodone combination drugs (ie. Vicodin and Lortab) are widely available and accessible with a doctor’s prescription. Under the Buchanan bill and Manchin amendment, hydrocodone substances are reclassified as a Schedule II drug, resulting in more stringent controls. Pharmacists would require patients to present an original prescription for refills and traffickers would be subject to harsher fines and penalties.

Hydrocodone abuse has been growing at an alarming rate nationwide. Over 131 million prescriptions of Vicodin were filled in 2010 alone – enough to give 24 Vicodin pills to every man, woman, and child in the U.S. Fatal drug overdoses now outweigh the number of traffic fatalities in this country.

“For over a decade, abuse and death from prescription drugs has escalated to what now is

being called an ‘epidemic’ by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention,” said Suncoast mothers Ruth Lyerly and Cindy Harney, who both tragically lost their sons to prescription drug abuse. “We contacted Congressman Buchanan a year ago and thanks to his ongoing efforts to have the FDA reschedule these highly addictive drugs, families might be spared the sorrow and pain of losing a child or loved one.”

Buchanan’s bipartisan “Pill Mill Crackdown Act” is supported by 59 members of Congress, Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi, and key law enforcement groups. Buchanan introduced his bill in March of 2011. Manchin, after contacting Buchanan’s office about the bill, introduced his companion legislation in the Senate seven months later.